

Shepherding the Savior's Sheep

I Peter 5:1-4

Introduction: On October 2, 1840, a man named Dan Edwards was ordained as a missionary to the Jews. On that occasion, the Scottish minister Robert Murray M'Cheyne (1813-1843) would charge him: "Remember you are God's sword, His instrument – I trust a chosen vessel unto Him to bear His name. In great measure, according to the purity and perfection of the instrument, will be success. It is not great talents God blesses so much as great likeness to Jesus. A holy minister is an awful weapon in the hand of God." (Quoted in Andrew Bonar, *Memoirs of McCheyne* (Moody, 1978), 95).

The call to the ministry is indeed a great and holy calling. Those who are God called and scripturally qualified for this assignment are not left to wonder exactly what God expects of them in terms of a job description. Four texts, in particular, paint a crystal clear picture what the "chief Shepherd," (1 Peter 5:4), the Lord Jesus, expects them to be and expects them to do. These text are:

- 1) Acts 20:17-38 → Pauls' address to the Ephesian elders at Miletus
- 2) 1 Timothy 3:1-7 → Paul's instructions to Timothy
- 3) Titus 1:5-9 → Paul's instructions to Titus
- 4) 1 Peter 5:1-4 → Peter's instructions to elders among the "elect exiles" of the diaspora (1:1)

Thirty years ago, in his classic *No Place For Truth*, David Wells drew attention to the drop in social status ministers held. He noted, “In a study measuring social prestige, on a scale from 1 to 100, ministers ranked 52, side by side with factory foreman and the operator of power stations” (p. 112). Unfortunately, things have not improved. In an article published by “Lifeway Research,” January 22, 2021, entitled, “American’s Trust of Pastors Hovers Near All-Time Low,” it was reported the most trusted professions are:

Nurses 89%

Doctors 77%

Pharmacists 71%

Pastors trailed far behind, coming in 7th out of 15 professions, with only 39% giving pastors high marks for honesty.

Ratings of the various professions by the public perception of honesty:

#1: Nurses (89% high/very high)

Medical doctors (77%)

Grade-school teachers (75%)

Pharmacists (75%)

Police officers (52%)

Judges (43%)

#7: Clergy (39%)

Nursing home operators (36%)

Bankers (29%)

Journalists (28%)

Lawyers (21%)

Business executives (17%)

Advertising practitioners (10%)

Car salespeople (8%)

#15: Members of Congress (8%)

What has led to this dilemma, this spiritual crisis? I believe the answer in large part is this: we suffer from an “identity confusion.” Pastors, in particular, have forgotten or lost sight of who we are and what we do.

We now see ourselves more as managers and organizers than pastors and ministers.

We now strive to excel in flashy programs, creative worship, counseling the congregation, raising money, providing administrative direction, and ministering to children and youth while keeping our senior citizens happy.

We have set aside the priority to be ministers of the **word** who “rightly divide the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15) and ministers of our **LORD** who understand we are shepherds not ranchers, pastors not CEO’s.

Churches throughout our country and among the nations may vary radically in culture, atmosphere, and worship style. But, what is absolutely essential is that

they have biblical ministers who lead them, faithful men who shepherd the Savior's sheep.

First Peter 5:1-4 is a crucial text for pastors who lead the churches of the "chief Shepherd." It should be read and studied against the backdrop of Ezekiel 34 and the unfaithful shepherds God says "I am against" (Ezek. 34:10). It helps us see what a pastor is and what a pastor does. Along with Acts 20:17-28, it also brings together in one place the 3 key words that designate the leaders of the local :1) elder (*presbuteros*), overseer (*episkopos*) and 3) pastor (*poimen*). The terms are interchangeable and refer to the same office of spiritual leadership. It is also instructive the word "elder" is in the plural. Peter gives three exhortations to the men who occupy this important office in the Lord's churches. We dare not neglect his words.

I. There is encouragement for the servant of God. (5:1)

The context of this passage is "glory (10x in ch. 4-5) through suffering" (6x in ch. 4). In 4:12, Peter warns his readers of fiery trials "that will come" "to test you." In 4:16 he pleads with them to not be ashamed when they suffer, but to glorify God as faithful Christians. In 4:19 he challenges all believers to "entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good." Now he addresses specifically how the elders who lead the church should do this.

Several avenues of encouragement are discussed in 5:1 and they come from three sources: (1) our partners in service; (2) our perception of the Savior; and (3) our participation in salvation. Historically, Peter is writing to those who are undergoing suffering and trials. It is possible that the madness of emperor Nero, who burned Rome in A.D. 64 and blamed it on the Christians, has found its way to the outer edges of the empire (cf. 1:1). It was essential that the local churches be encouraged and instructed, fed and led by their leaders, their pastors, their elders. It is necessary and essential that these men rejoice as they share in Christ's sufferings (4:12) and as they commit their souls to God in doing good (4:19).

1) Let your encouragement come from your partners in service. 5:1

- Peter begins by exhorting (Gr. *parakaleo*), by calling alongside or encouraging, the elders of the churches. The word "elder" (*presbuteros*), from which we get our word presbyterian, signifies the office of a church leader. It was a word of respect normally bestowed upon an aged and mature man of "prudence, gravity, and experience" (Calvin, *1 Peter*, XXII, 143). It became a term of respect, honor, dignity, and esteem that the office itself requires. To these men, Peter encourages them as a "fellow elder," as one involved in the same calling, experiencing the same trials, and given the same responsibilities. He does not pull rank as an apostle or speak with

condescension. He stands shoulder to shoulder with them. He is indeed one of them and one with them. He understands the challenges of ministry and he can empathize with their responsibilities and their difficulties.

To be an effective and successful pastor, you need the encouragement of others. There is no place for a Lone Ranger in the ministry. You need the support of those walking the same path as you. You need others and they need you.

2) Let your encouragement come from your perception of the Savior.

The word “witness” (Gr. *martus*) identifies one who has seen something, who speaks of it, and if necessary, suffers for it. Peter saw Christ suffer. Whether he was at the cross, we do not know. He did see our Lord as he suffered in Gethsemane, and he was there in the courtyard following his arrest (see Mk. 14:66). Later he would, with the other disciples, see with his own eyes the scars left in our Lord’s body from his passion (see John 20:26-29). Peter would speak concerning our Lord’s passion, and he would suffer for the message he proclaimed. Tradition says Peter eventually was put to death in Rome, being crucified upside down. He had become a faithful witness for his Lord.

Fear is a great silencer. In your life and mine, as in the life of Peter, it can shut us up and render us mute. How can we overcome this troubling

temptation? We must spend time in the word and prayer that we might know and perceive fully the passion and person of our Savior. Draw near to Calvary! Meditate on the cross! It has been well said, “if we would make Christ known to others, we must first know him ourselves.” Knowing him, we will speak concerning him, we will boldly proclaim his gospel and we will be willing, if necessary, to suffer for him.

3) Let your encouragement come from your participation in salvation.

Peter refers to himself as a “partaker” (Gr. *koinonos*), a sharer, a participating saint of the glory of God which will ultimately and fully be revealed at the Second Coming of Christ. In the midst of suffering and the circumstances of this life, Peter writes that the hope we have of sharing, participating in God’s glory, when Christ comes again strengthens us and sustains us in the monumental task before us. It will keep us in the fight until the end.

For the servant of God, through the agencies of prayer, the Bible, the Holy Spirit, and God’s people, we have a foretaste, a sharing today of what heaven’s glory will be like forever. We can know now, in a small way, what life with Christ will be like forever in his presence. As Fanny Crosby beautifully wrote, “blessed assurance Jesus is mine, oh what a foretaste of glory divine.”

As we avail ourselves of these privileges, we will be encouraged as servants of God to serve well and finish well (see 2 Tim. 4:7).

Having laid this foundation of encouragement, Peter now moves to the specifics of the minister's assignment, his job description. Our assignment is simple and two-fold: 1) shepherd and 2) serve.

II. There are expectations for the servant of God. 5:2-3

Elders (Gr. *presbuteros*) denote the office of a minister. The word feed or shepherd (Gr. *poimen*), from which we get our word pastor (see Eph. 4:11), and taking the oversight or serving as overseers (Gr. *episkopos*), from which we get our words bishop and episcopal, describe the function of the minister. Again, all three terms appear elsewhere in the New Testament and together in Acts 20:17-28. Once more, a careful examination of the New Testament reveals that these three words are used interchangeably to describe the minister, the spiritual leader of the church. He is an elder, a pastor, a bishop or overseer.

1) We shepherd God's people. 5:2

In verse 2, the elder is commanded (aorist imperative) to feed or shepherd, to tend the flock, a flock which is not his own but God's. We must never forget the church belongs to Christ not us! John Piper puts it like this, "You elders shepherd the people whom God purchased with his own blood" [Acts 20:28]...don't take this work lightly. Don't be casual and cavalier and

breezy about this responsibility” (“Who Shall Shepherd the Flock?” 4-24-94). This shepherding is further amplified by the phrase “exercising oversight” (*ESV*) or “serving as overseers” (*NKJV*). A minister of God is to care for the needs of his church. He is to protect and provide. He is to feed and lead. It is an assignment which requires hard work, much personal attention, and spiritual commitment.

After the resurrection of Jesus in John 21:15-19, our Lord commanded Peter to feed, pastor, shepherd his sheep, knowing that sheep have a tendency to wander aimlessly. Without direction they get lost and hurt. They may starve in desolation without the care and protection of the shepherd.

The job of a spiritual shepherd is hard work, and it has many facets. Three key aspects are those of feeding the church the word of God and protecting the church from heresy and division. It also involves the work of an evangelist (2 Tim. 4:5). Each of these is related to the ministry of the Word (see Acts 6:2-4). Ministers must preach and teach their people God’s infallible, inerrant word. This demands study, prayer, and expository preaching, preaching that is book by book, chapter by chapter and verse by verse. Secondly, we must protect and warn our people concerning anyone who would question the total accuracy of the Bible and the essential doctrines of the Christian faith. We guard the body from dogs, wolves and pigs! Thirdly, we must do the work of

an evangelist, making it a priority to be on mission and to be about the business of leading people to faith in Christ. These are the expectations of the Lord who called us. They are crystal clear.

As we shepherd God's people, nothing is more necessary than a word based, expository preaching ministry. J.I. Packer put it perfectly when he said, "The true idea of preaching is that the preacher should become a mouthpiece for his text, opening it up and applying it as a word of God to his hearers, talking only in order 'that the text may speak itself and be heard, and making each point from his text in such a manner that his hearers may discern how God teach[es] it'..." [Westminster Dictionary, 1645], (*God Has Spoken*, 28). I have a question, an important question, a crucial question. Suppose your people handled the word of God the way you handle the word of God from your pulpit. What would be the end of that? Suppose they expound it like you expound it, teach it like you teach it, treat scripture like you treat scripture? Would that be a good thing or a bad thing for your flock?! John Stott sounds the alarm so well at this point: "We should never presume to occupy a pulpit unless we believe in this God, [the God of the Bible]. How dare we speak if God has not spoken? By ourselves we have nothing to say.... Once we are persuaded that God has spoken, however, then we too

must speak.” (*Between Two Worlds*, 96). A healthy flock will have a healthy diet of the Word of God.

2) We serve God’s people. 5:2-3

Three phrases (adverbial modifiers) in these verses give us a negative and a positive perspective on how a pastor, an elder, a bishop, is to serve the church. Each is highly instructive. I suspect Peter penned these words because the elders needed to hear them in these particular areas.

A) Serve willingly. (5:2) (for the right reason)

Our service is not to be by constraint or compulsion, but willingly. We serve not because we were pushed into it, because of intense pressure from without. No, we shepherd God’s church willingly, voluntarily, because we want to, because we love the work! There is an internal compulsion we cannot deny and would not dare attempt to escape. We will not be lazy and we will not serve out of fear. We will delight in the work.

There is one reason and only one reason to be in the ministry: because God called you and you can be happy doing nothing else. It is simply the fact that you love doing it, you must do it, you want to do it. With all of the pressures that come with being a pastor, you must have the right reason for being in the work. There is an internal willingness and love

implanted by God, a love for God and a love for God's people. This is how God would have it.

B) Serve eagerly. (5:2) (for the right motive)

Money is not our motivation. Greed is not our god! We serve not for the sake of getting rich, which becomes dishonorable or dishonest gain. It is not to advance financially as 1 Tim. 6:7-10 warns. Rather, we are to do our work with a ready mind, better, "eagerly," with enthusiasm and zeal, with sheer delight, joy, and love for our holy assignment.

Sadness must engulf the heart of God when, in our day, ministers' parade about like celebrities and superstars with pleas for money constantly on their tongue. So many fill the airways and the internet with a pseudo-gospel message, though this malady is striking closer to home with each passing day. The cause of Christ is brutally marred when men prostitute the gospel for personal gain, and so often leave a smaller church for a bigger one, stating publicly it is God's will, but whispering privately it was the money. God forbid that the overriding concern of a pulpit committee will ever be: "how much will it take to get you here?"

The Bible does not condemn the paying of a minister. Obviously ministers were being paid or this phrase would not be here. In fact, a good minister is said to be worthy of double honor (1Tim. 5:17).

Furthermore, a church devoted to our Lord should see that its ministers are cared and provided for and not abused and burdened with financial worries. However, Scripture does condemn the manipulation of the ministry for the gaining of wealth. Servants of God, you work not for pay, but for the sheer love, joy, and delight of the work of the Lord. The acquisition of wealth is never to become your goal. God forbid that you should ever compromise your stand for God because of money. That includes your location of service too! You are to have the attitude that, “if I could, I’d work for nothing and work in this place forever.” That and nothing less is to be the attitude you must have.

C) Serve humbly. (5:3) (in the right manner)

Peter closes verse 3 with a strong warning against pride in the ministry. One is to care for God’s church, “not (a strong negative) as lording or domineering over those in your charge but being an example (a model (Gr. *tupos*), a type) to the flock” (v. 3). You must avoid what I call “the Diotrephes syndrome” (3 John 9-10)! You are not to be dictatorial or authoritarian because of the position with which God has graced you, but rather you are to be a pattern worthy to be copied. You are to cultivate such character and conduct that your life is a type and example of the one you are following; Jesus himself (see 1 Cor. 11:1).

In the good old days (!), when you typed a paper and wanted the letter “a” you hit the “a” key and an “a” appears on the page. Yet in reality, the “a” was on the key within the typewriter. The typed “a” on the paper was a copy of the real “a”. That which is on the paper is a type.

Your life as a minister of Christ is to be on the paper of your life, a type, a copy of the Jesus. Your life is to be so much like Jesus that your people could legitimately look at you and say, “when I look at him, in so many ways, it is like looking at the Jesus I see in the Bible.” You are to be a model for the flock to imitate; you are to set the standard in every area, as a husband, a father, a man of God. You are to love Christ more and the people of God more. You are to witness more, serve more, pray more. It is well said, “the church needs leaders who serve and servants who lead.” And remember, “we cannot lead others where we have not been ourselves.”

Peter has examined the encouragements and expectations of the minister,

Lastly he turns to the minister’s future exaltation and reward.

III. There will be an exaltation of the servant of God. 5:4

Verse four reveals to those in the ministry two precious and eternal truths which we shall examine together concerning our future exaltation and reward.

1) It comes from the chief Shepherd.

2) It consists of a crown of splendor.

When Jesus “appears” the second time, better “is manifest,” he will come as the chief Shepherd, the arch-Shepherd (*archpoimenos*). Then, he will grant to his faithful ministers a crown of glory that is everlasting. The word “unfading” comes from the Greek word *amaranth*, “a flower whose unfading quality was the symbol of immortality” (D. Edmond Hiebert, *1 Peter*, 307). Jesus, who is the chief Shepherd (1 Pet. 5:4), the good Shepherd (John 10:11), and the great Shepherd (Heb. 13:20), shall be the one to exalt and lift up the under-shepherds of his flock. In doing so, he will bless them with the gift of an incorruptible, unfading and eternal crown of glory.

In Peter’s day, men ran in the Olympics to win the victor’s prize which was a flowery wreath to be worn about the head in triumph and splendor. Yet, it was worn for only a short time for it soon wilted and faded. It was corruptible, perishable, fading. Christian workers may labor for many rewards. Some seek to build personal empires, others long for the applause of men, still others strive for denominational acclaim and promotion. All of these, like the ancient wreath, will fade, pass away and vanish. The minister’s true reward is not present but future. It is not from men, but from God. It is not perishable, but imperishable. For the faithful minister of Christ there is reserved the eternal, unfading crown of glory. Interestingly, as one scans the book of Revelation

and comes to 4:10, he finds the 24 elders on their knees before God casting forth their crowns of glory before the throne of Jesus, acknowledging even then, with great humility, that all that they rendered in service on this earth was because of him and for him.

Conclusion: Charles Jefferson, in his classic work *The Minister as Shepherd*, says there are seven basic functions of the genuine shepherd:

1. To love the sheep
2. To feed the sheep
3. To rescue the sheep
4. To attend and comfort the sheep
5. To guide the sheep
6. To guard and protect the sheep
7. To watch over the sheep. (p.39-66).

In fulfilling these functions, one easily sees the centrality and priority of the Word of God. Luther was most certainly correct when he wrote, “let us then consider it certain and conclusively established that the soul can do without all things except the word of God, and that where this is not there is no help for the soul in anything else whatever. But if it has the word it is rich and lacks nothing, since this word is the word of life, of truth, of light, of peace, of righteousness, of salvation, of joy, of

liberty, of wisdom, of power, of grace, of glory, and of every blessing beyond our power to estimate.” (“A Treatise on Christian Liberty,” in *Three Treatises*, p.23).

Preach the Word! Shepherd the Savior’s sheep. There is an eternal reward that awaits you that you will receive from Jesus himself. What more could the faithful minister want?!